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SUBJECT: TFX001: INITIAL EC RESPONSE TO ASIAN TSUNAMI

REF: STATE 273476

1. SUMMARY: The European Commission has activated two emergency mechanisms to meet the immediate humanitarian assistance needs arising from the December 26 earthquake and tsunamis in the Indian Ocean. The EU's Community Mechanism

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Civil Protection Unit and Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) have generated and coordinated in-kind contributions from ten member states, primarily for Sri Lanka. Most of the contributions are in the form of medical teams and supplies. The Commission Directorate General (DG) for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) immediately pledged 3 million Euros for the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), to be followed by further funding decisions up to 30 million Euros for relief efforts and a comprehensive rehabilitation package. An initial expedited funding decision to release 10 million Euros to international organizations and NGO partners is expected by the end of the week. The Dutch Presidency issued a statement December 27 expressing sorrow over the tragedy and promising further assistance. END SUMMARY.

2. MIC: After receiving news of the disaster on December 26, the two-person team on duty at MIC began coordinating in-kind contributions from the civil protection units of approximately 10 member states, primarily for Sri Lanka. The contributions have been funded by the following member states: France (air hospital, water, search and rescue); Sweden (tents, medical relief); Greece (medical relief); Hungary (medical team/relief); Italy (medical team); Slovakia (medical team); Czech Republic, Malta and Bulgaria (tents, bottled water, blankets). At this point MIC is suspending its efforts to solicit more contributions until it hears more from UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) assessment teams in each country.

3. ECHO: On December 26, Development Commissioner Louis Michel announced a pledge of 3 million Euros to fund ICRC humanitarian assistance efforts in South Asia. Characterizing the disaster as one of the world's worst natural disasters in many years, the Commissioner expressed no doubt that a further "substantial sum" of up to 30 million euros would follow for relief and a comprehensive rehabilitation package.⁸ At ECHO, the Head of Unit for Asia, Central and Latin America (who returned from vacation to deal with the disaster) told us that a 10 million Euro emergency decision is underway and will probably be out by the end of the week. ECHO is waiting for the reports of the 3-person assessment teams currently in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. The reports are expected in the next day or two, at which time the decision can be approved. An expedited procedure can be used for amounts up to 10 million, and the strategy is to get the funds out as soon as possible and then follow up with further decisions. The funds will be released to international organizations and NGO partners based on needs assessments and funding requests.

4. PRESIDENCY: On December 26, the Dutch Presidency issued a statement expressing shock and sorrow over the disaster. The statement mentioned the immediate responses of various member states, and said "the EU stands ready to assist in every way possible to alleviate the sad plight of the victims."⁸

McKinley